The Black River & Western Story

Drawings by Lloyd Arkinstall, except as initialed.

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The Black River & Western Story

by Virginia Smith

To Jim Burenga

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Photo by Vince Alvino

RINGOES-BOUND with a school trip, No. 60 sports the black smokebox she acquired for a television commercial in 1972.

Would you believe: a railroad that earns its own way, runs on time, keeps its passengers and freight customers happy, maintains its equipment in good shape—a railroad whose future is very promising indeed?

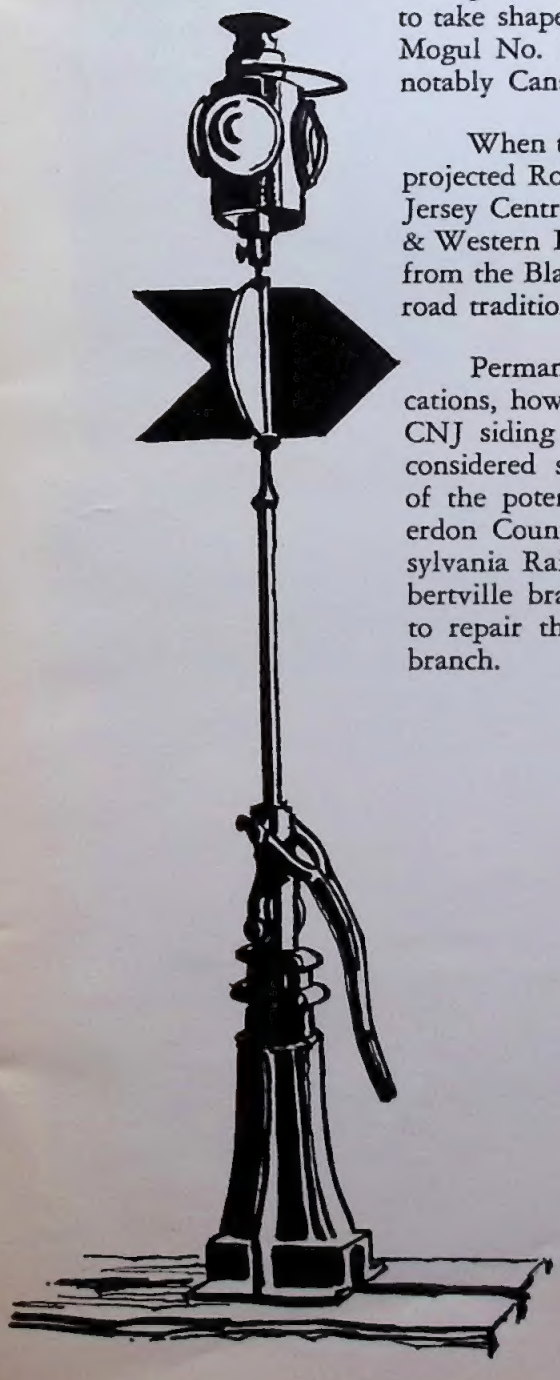
Drive west about 50 miles out of New York City, or north about 30 miles out of Philadelphia until you hear the sound of a steam whistle. And there, in the rolling hills of western New Jersey, between the Hunterdon County seat of Flemington and the hamlet of Ringoes, runs a healthy little carrier called the Black River & Western Railroad, tooling along as happily as if the era of railroad bankruptcy had never dawned.

A *real* railroad? Yes, indeed—all twelve miles of it, from its southwestern freight connection with the Penn Central in Lambertville on the Delaware River to its northeastern connection with the Jersey Central in Flemington. During the summer season the BR&W operates steam excursion trains between Flemington and Ringoes, the railroad headquarters, and it runs to Lambertville in serving its freight shippers all year round. And the little line hopes to double its freight business and increase its trackage in the near future, while its passenger revenue continues to climb steadily.

What's the secret to this unusual present day railroad success story? Good teamwork, competent volunteer help, wise management, a favorable location, and of course a certain element of luck—all these factors are important. But perhaps the key ingredient is the quiet magic of an enterprise shared by men who are in it for the love of the work. The Black River & Western is more than a railroad; it is the realization of a dream.

Beginnings

The dream had its start with one man: William R. Whitehead, a sales engineer in Oldwick, N. J. An old railroad right of way ran through his property, a part of the long gone Rockaway Valley line. This was a peach-hauling road that met its demise around the turn of the century when the San Jose peach blight destroyed most of the county's orchards. In the late 1950's Whitehead and his sons began laying track and collecting rolling stock "to give the family something to do." As the idea of a tourist line began to take shape, other spare-time railroaders joined in. Rolling stock included Lackawanna Mogul No. 565 from the Dansville & Mt. Morris Railroad and four or five coaches, notably Canadian Northern business car No. 105, *Seafalls.*



When the state gave notice that the backyard railroad was in the path of then-projected Route 78, the group moved its equipment to the Chester Hill branch of the Jersey Central Railroad (CNJ) between Chester and Long Valley. The Black River & Western Railroad was incorporated in 1960 and chartered in 1961, taking its name from the Black River near Chester. The "Western" part of the title is simply classic railroad tradition.

Permanent location on the Chester Hill branch was prevented by various complications, however, and No. 565 and the coaches went on display in Flemington on a CNJ siding near the Flemington Cut Glass Company, while the would-be railroaders considered sites as far away as Connecticut. But local authorities were not unaware of the potential tourist attraction of a steam railroad, and a suggestion from the Hunterdon County planning board eventually developed into an arrangement with the Pennsylvania Railroad. The Black River & Western leased the Pennsy's Flemington-Lambertville branch for tourist operations, paying a yearly rental of $5,000 and agreeing to repair the rather deteriorated track. The PRR still handled freight service on the branch.

Photo by John Bishop

BRIDGES PAST AND PRESENT. Above: In the days on the Chester Hill branch, Mogul No. 565 takes a drink via pump and hose from the South Branch of the Raritan River near Long Valley, before the BR&W moved to its present location. No. 565 was replaced by Consolidation No. 60 and is now on static display at Citro's restaurant in Wayne, N. J. **Right:** On the Flemington branch, No. 60 crosses the rippled Neshanic on her way toward Copper Hill and Ringoes. In 1866 this spot was the scene of a wreck when a special CNJ train left the bridge and plunged into the creek.

Photo by Vince Alvino

Photo by Steve Harrison
Courtesy, *Hunterdon County Democrat*

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT BARELY COULD. Assigned to pull the train taking BR&W stockholders on tour of their newly acquired railroad in April 1965 when ICC clearance for No. 60 did not come through on time, gas-electric Mack locomotive No. 1 is dwarfed by its two-car consist. The tiny engine, a rarity in locomotive power, found the train almost more than it could handle. Top speed downhill with a tail wind may have gone as high as five miles an hour, and periodic stops were necessary to let the motor cool down.

On May 16, 1965, excursion runs officially began at the Black River & Western with Governor Richard J. Hughes cracking a bottle of champagne on the rear driver of steam locomotive No. 60, which had replaced No. 565. Four hundred paying passengers, in addition to the Governor and other dignitaries, rode the first official passenger train. For the next five years the BR&W ran a regular weekend and holiday tourist schedule during the summer, increasing its passenger business steadily. It also operated special trips on weekdays during the spring and fall for schoolchildren and occasionally played host to movie crews and ad men seeking an oldtime railroad setting.

Then on March 16, 1970 a big step was taken: the Black River & Western assumed ownership and operation of the whole Flemington line, buying it from the Penn Central for $153,000. By taking over the freight service, the BR&W graduated from a private excursion line to a full-fledged common carrier subject to regulation by the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Public Utilities Commission. The Black River thus joined the ranks of the *real* railroads, in comparison to which, as engineer Porter Collins is fond of saying, "We're not as long but just as wide."

YESTERDAY ON THE FLEMINGTON BRANCH. Above: Ringoes station in the 1890's. This shot by an unknown photographer of Pennsylvania 2-8-0 No. 485 proves that Black River's No. 60 was not the first Consolidation to run on the Flemington line. Note kerosene lamps for engine headlight and station lighting. **Below:** Long-vanished Copper Hill station. The siding occupied by the gondola cars in the background may well be the passing siding used today by Black River in its two-train operations on Sundays in July and August. Again, the identity of the photographer in this case was not recorded for posterity, but the shape of the locomotive (which may be a PRR D-16) dates the picture at about 1910.

History of the Flemington Railroad

The roadbed used by the BR&W was originally built in 1854 by the Flemington Railroad and Transportation Company, an offshoot of the Belvidere-Delaware (Bel-Del) Railroad; eventually both of these lines were incorporated into the Pennsylvania Railroad. Interested citizens of Lambertville and Flemington fought hard to get their railroad in those days when railroad fever was sweeping the nation and the iron horse was acclaimed as the steed upon which prosperity would ride into town. When the line opened in December 1854, the editor of the *Hunterdon Gazette* rhapsodized, "At last, the ears of our delighted population are greeted with the melodious sound of the steam whistle."

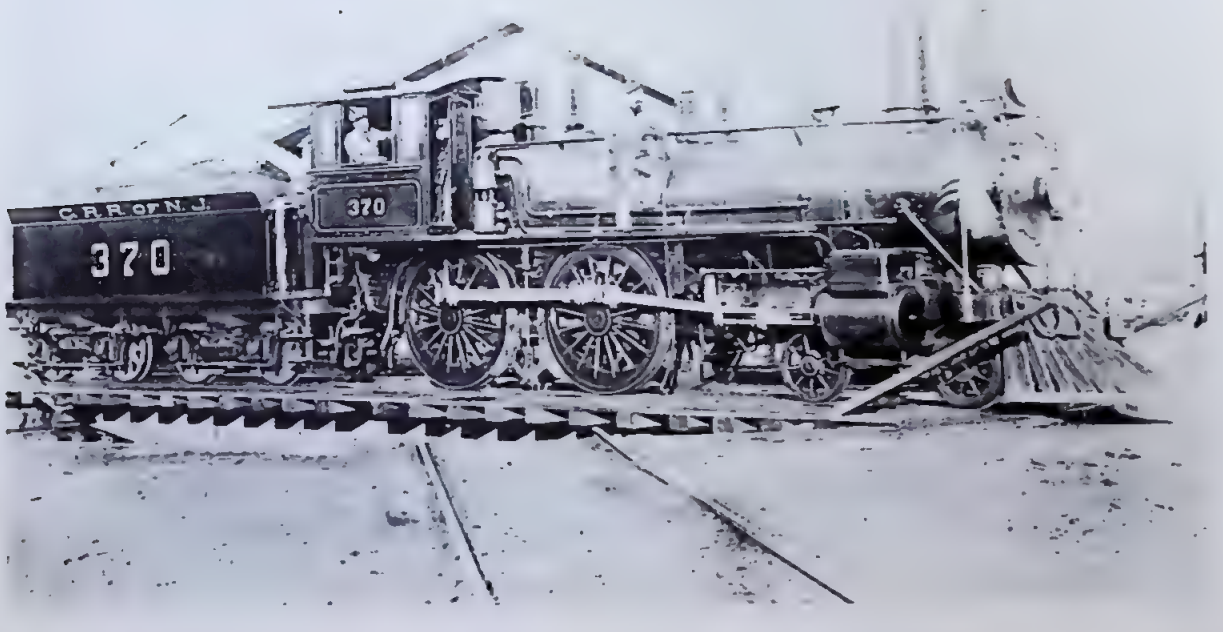
The delighted population did not rush to ride the train, however; on the first day of operation only two tickets to Ringoes and four to Lambertville were sold at the Flemington end of the line. Passenger business never was large on the road, but it did increase above its modest beginnings, and during the 1920's six passenger trains ran daily into Flemington, with connections to Trenton and Philadelphia via the Bel-Del. There are today many local citizens who remember commuting to school or work or just riding into town on the Flemington Railroad.

It was freight, however, that always was the main business of the line, which at the beginning of World War I was the second largest milk shipping line on the entire Pennsylvania Railroad system. The building at Ringoes used at present by the Black River & Western for an enginehouse is a former milk station, which used to ship some 6,000 gallons of milk daily from the local region to Philadelphia.

Although the Flemington Railroad rarely made history outside the county, events on the little line apparently were typical of the early days of railroading. Shortly after the line commenced operations the *Hunterdon County Democrat* carried the following item: "A horse . . . while standing tied near the depot last week, became frightened at the locomotive, threw himself upon the ground, and died immediately." This was a rather extreme example of the initial reaction of livestock everywhere to steam locomotives. As for the plight of the railroad passenger, here is another item from the *Democrat* ten years later: "The Flemington Railroad is noted for its slow running, and the other day a passenger asked the conductor if his ticket was good for that day only in case the train didn't make it till the morrow. Not to be bested, the conductor said as the train approached Flemington, 'I'll take that ticket now, you've rode long enough for only 40 cents.'" Writing in 1912, John H. Steele recalled what it was like to ride the Flemington line in the mid 1800's: "The locomotive burned wood, and after sundown . . . it was my great delight to watch the innumerable sparks which would come from the smokestacks of the engines."

In 1871 the Flemington Railroad, the only line that was strictly a Hunterdon County affair, was absorbed into the Pennsylvania Railroad system, to which it "made a minor contribution to revenues and none to profits" (Burgess and Kennedy, *Centennial History of the Pennsylvania Railroad,* Philadelphia, 1949, p. 264). The Central Railroad of New Jersey had run its Short Line into Flemington to connect with the local road in 1863, and 21 years later the Lehigh Valley spur from Flemington Junction reached the county seat. By 1889, 54 scheduled trains entered and left Flemington daily on its three railroads. After that high point, as elsewhere in the nation, passenger business declined steadily, and in the 1930's the Flemington Railroad ended its passenger runs. Steam gradually gave way to diesels, and in 1953 the little camelback steamer puffed into the Jersey Central station in Somerville for the last time. No longer were the ears of the delighted population of Hunterdon County greeted with the melodious sound of the steam whistle—until the Black River & Western waked the old echoes.

YESTERDAY IN FLEMINGTON: Railroad scenes taken by unknown photographers around the turn of the century. **Top:** The Central Railroad of New Jersey passenger depot, looking very much as it does today as the home of a contemporary restaurant. The freight station in the right background currently houses specialty shops. Note locomotive on the freight siding behind the team of horses on the right. **Bottom:** The Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station, which exists today, minus its cupola and with a number of other alterations, as quarters for gift and novelty shops.



Top: In 1895 a CRR of NJ passenger locomotive rides the turntable from which Turntable Junction derived its name. Note flags on the engine: was this the Fourth of July? **Bottom:** The manually powered ("Armstrong" to railroaders) turntable being cleared of snow in the winter of that same year. The quaint engine house and the other building in the background no longer exist; neither does the PRR turntable and a fieldstone engine house which marked that railroad's terminal facilities in Flemington.

THEN AND NOW. The Flemington PRR passenger station is the common backdrop in two photos taken approximately from the same spot but more than half a century apart. **Top:** A gleaming 19th-century PRR passenger locomotive with a tall cap stack poses for an unknown photographer in the days when the station still had its cupola. **Lower:** An equally shining No. 148 is reflected in the windows of a coach as she prepares for the return trip on her successful maiden run on the BR&W in April 1971.

Photo by Bill Withuhn

TURNTABLE JUNCTION TODAY. Above: The local Jersey Central drill on the Somerville branch in the late summer of 1971. BR&W's old "bobber" caboose on static display can be seen behind the flagpole. The view is toward the northeast, with the BR&W tracks lying some distance in back of the camera. If the brakeman riding the front of the diesel locomotive should step backward onto the ground, he would be facing the view below. **Below:** In this scene facing northwest, the CNJ's tracks are in the foreground, and in the center distance is the circular brick patio marking the site of the original CNJ turntable. In the left background, beyond BR&W No. 400 drilling freight, rises one of the old cone-shaped kilns preserved at Stangl Pottery works.

Black River & Western Current Status

The route followed by the Black River & Western is the same route laid out for the Flemington Railroad well over a hundred years ago. The line extends a little more than 12 miles from the interchange in Lambertville with the Belvidere-Delaware line of the Penn Central to the terminal in Turntable Junction just beyond the interchange with the Jersey Central in Flemington. Black River's rolling stock includes two steam locomotives, two diesels, about twenty assorted pieces of passenger equipment, and miscellaneous equipment for track maintenance. The BR&W is a private stock company with most of the shares owned by half a dozen stockholders. The company has seven directors and employs a two-man full time freight crew and a seasonal track maintenance team of about six men. Some 35 or 40 volunteers are called on to serve as crews for passenger excursions and school trips.

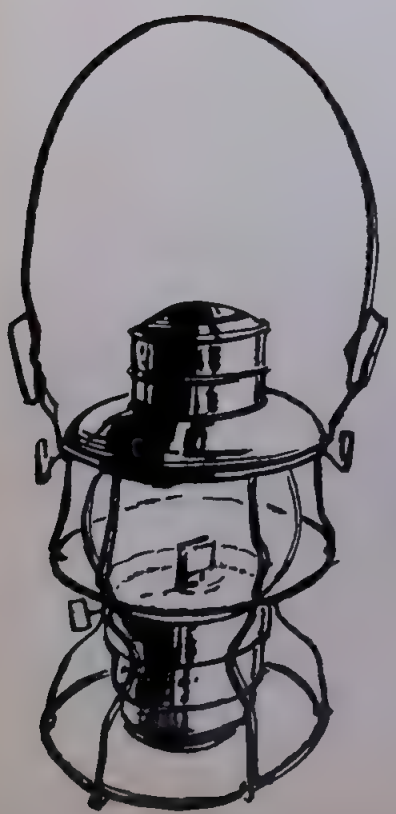
When the Black River men leased the Flemington branch from the PRR, one of their first concerns was the condition of the track. Working in their spare time, they gradually converted most of the original cinder ballasting to stone ballast, replaced rotted ties and broken rails, and tamped the roadbed. At the railroad's headquarters in Ringoes, the group completely restored from ruin the old passenger station, converted the milk receiving station into an enginehouse, installed a water tower for the steam locomotives, and built sidings for the storage of rolling stock.

During the first two years of operation, the BR&W used open-ended wooden coaches, some of which had been rebuilt in 1881. All of the coaches were restored by volunteer effort, some complete with varnished wood interiors, kerosene chandeliers, coal stoves, and brass match strikers. At the same time the group began accumulating an all-steel fleet of coaches, chiefly Jersey Central cars built in the 1920's. Although not as romantic as the wooden cars, the steel coaches are not only safer but have a higher seating capacity. Today only the steel cars are used in regular passenger service.

* * *

The first steam locomotive purchased by the BR&W was No. 565, a Mogul (wheel arrangement 2-6-0) built in 1906 for the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad. Later No. 565 was replaced by No. 60, a Consolidation (2-8-0) built in 1937 for the Great Western sugar beet hauling railroad in Colorado. In 1971 a Pacific type (4-6-2) passenger engine, 1920-built No. 148 from the Florida East Coast Railroad, was put in service after extensive overhaul at the Black River shop.

John Bishop, Black River's president, observes, "Our railroad has grown very much like the original railroads did. We started out with ancient wooden equipment and ended up with more modern cars. Also with our engines, from No. 565 to No. 148, we've been graduating to larger and larger motive power. We're sort of a prototype."



Both photos by N. Kent Loudon

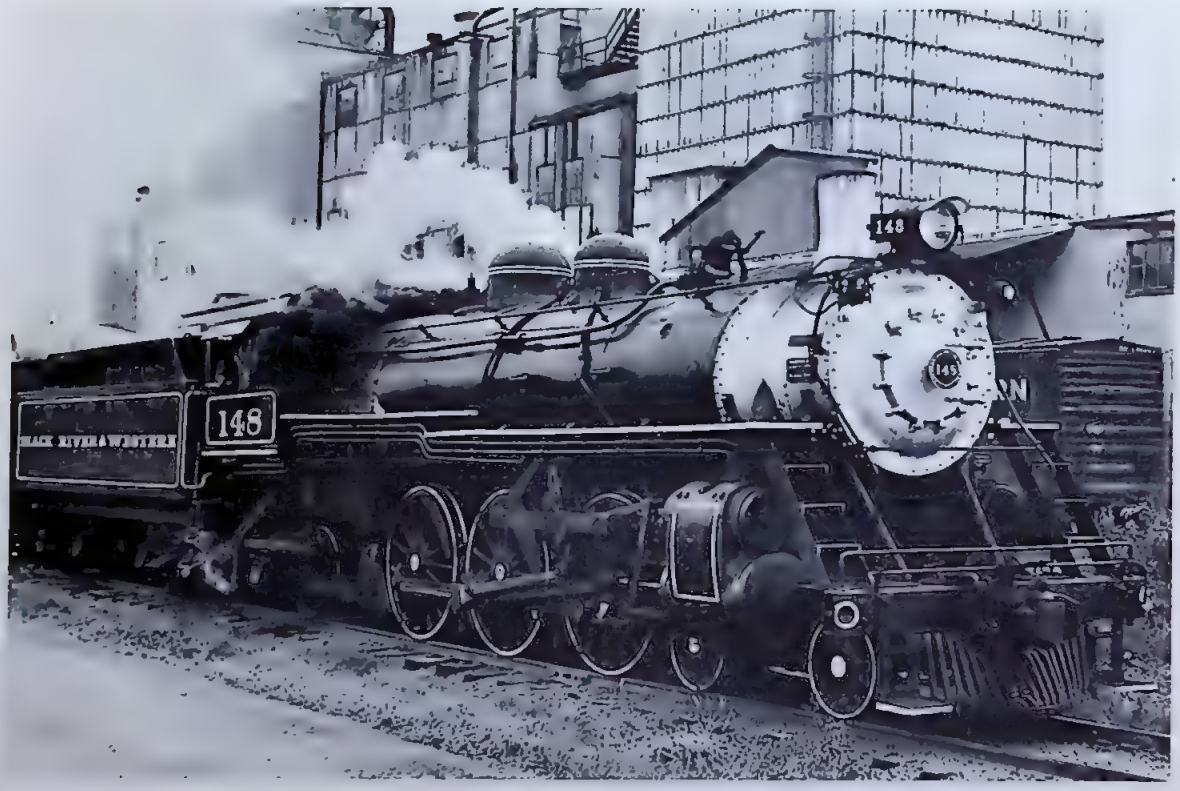
THERE'S MORE TO RAILROADING than just smoke. **Above:** Repair of a coach truck. **Below:** Replacement of a broken rail. The gandy dancers had plenty of this kind of work when the BR&W took over the Flemington branch. This rail break had been repaired in typical PRR fashion, with holes drilled in the broken ends and a plate bolted on to bridge the break.

Both photos by Bill Withuhn

A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE IS REBORN. After years of disuse, No. 148 was restored to operating condition at the Black River shop. **Above:** the steamer receives the finishing touch before her maiden BR&W run in April 1971 as Joe Adda mounts her number board. **Right:** a proud restoration crew just after the engine's successful maiden run. Top row: Jim Stinson, Porter Collins, George Schmidt, Tom Dennis. Second row: Gordon Lindsey, Roy Blanchard, Sam Freeman. Standing on ground: Nick Burenga, John Bishop, Lloyd Arkinstall, Craig Adams, Wayne Adams, Col. Howard Hill, Bob Ditmar, Nelson Tower, Norman Cole, Joe Adda. Seated: Carl Conover.

Photo by Howard Pincus

NO. 60 ROLLS OUT of the Penn Central diesel shops in Morrisville, Pa. in December 1970 after completion of repair work on her spring hangers. The visit of a live steam engine created a minor sensation at the diesel shop, where some men still remember working on the big fire-breathing monsters that were once the main motive power of America. Gazing at #60 when she arrived under steam at the Morrisville Yards, one old-time railroader said huskily "I haven't seen one of these in 20 years". And he didn't care who saw the tears.

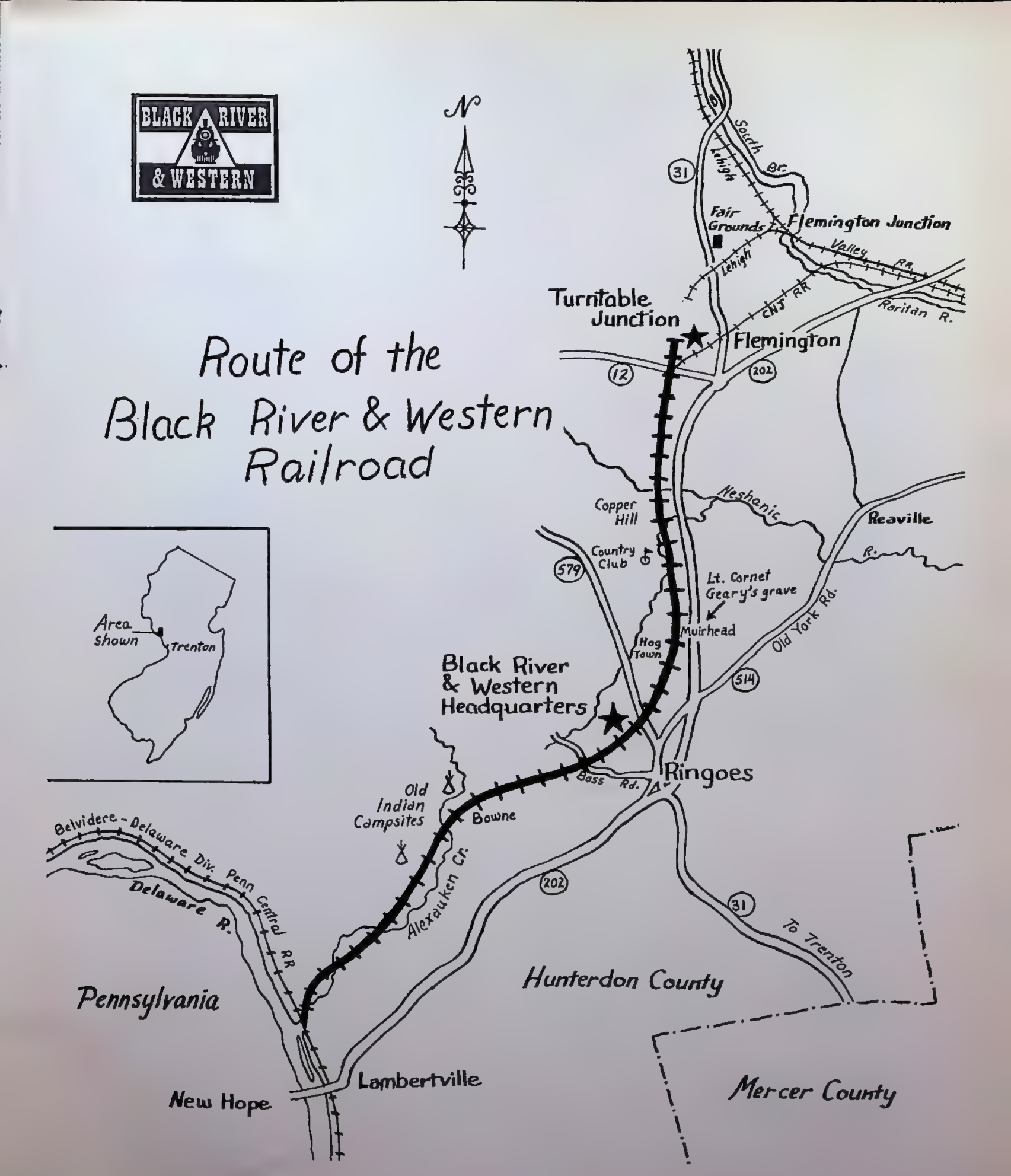


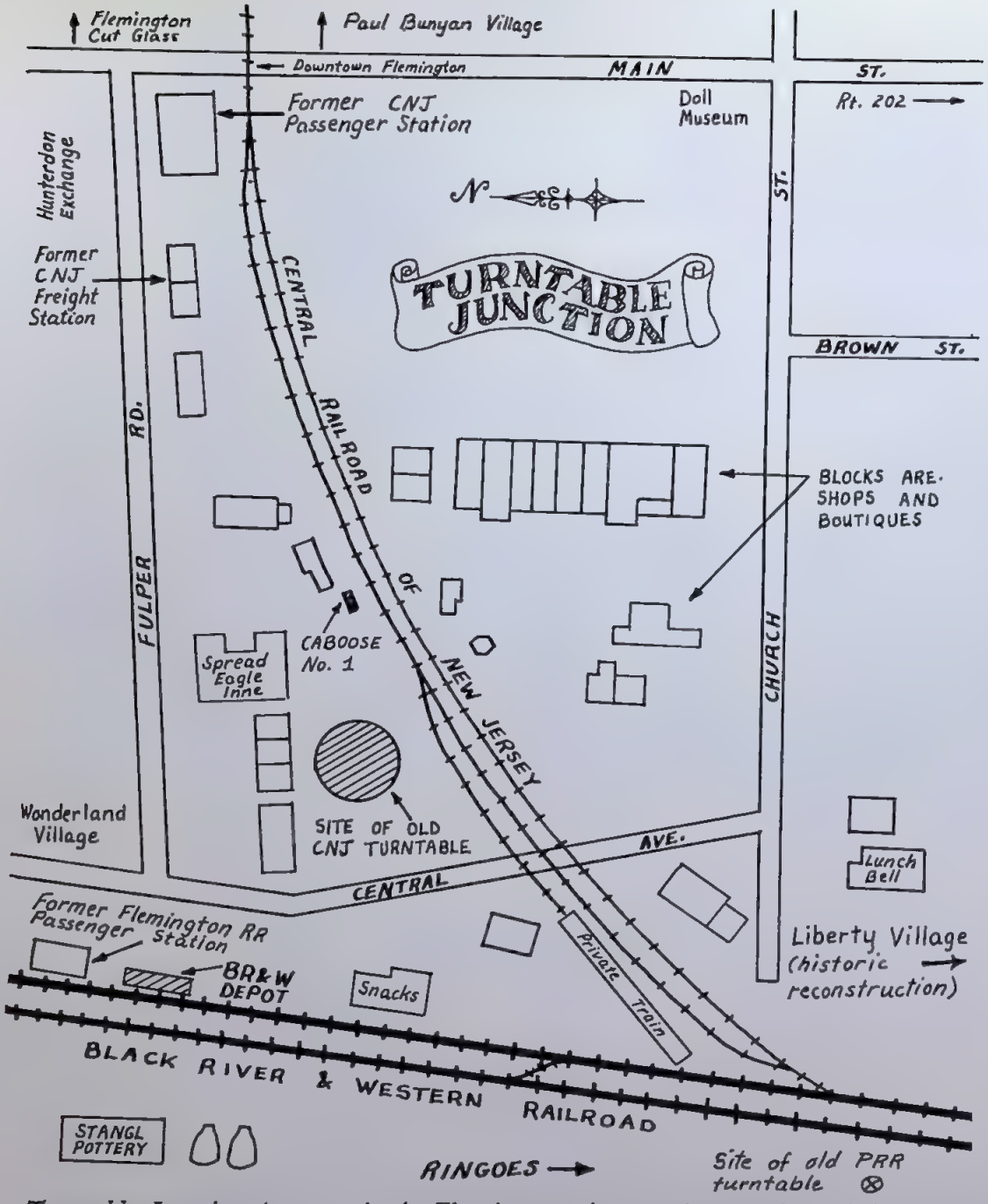
Operations

Passenger

On summer weekends, holidays and Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in July and August, a steam powered passenger train runs between Ringoes and Flemington, taking about half an hour for the five and a half mile trip each way. In 1972 a second train was added on Sunday afternoons in July and August, running 45 minutes behind the first. Steeple cab diesel No. 7079, or sometimes No. 400, the diesel usually used in freight service, handled the second train during the 1972 season, although eventually both trains may be steam powered.

Ticket offices are located in both Ringoes and Flemington. The trip runs through scenic farm country, and there are special points of interest at both boarding points.


BLACK RIVER & WESTERN
Route of the
Black River & Western
Railroad
N
South Lehigh Br.
31
Fair Grounds
Flemington Junction
Valley RR
Lehigh
CNJ RR
Raritan R.
Turntable Junction
Flemington
12
202
Copper Hill
Neshanic
Reaville
R.
Country Club
579
Lt. Cornet Geary's grave
Muirhead
Hog Town
Old York Rd.
514
Black River & Western Headquarters
Ringoes
Bass Rd.
Old Indian Campsites
Bowne
Alexauken Cr.
202
31
To Trenton
Belvidere - Delaware Div. Penn Central RR
Delaware R.
Pennsylvania
Hunterdon County
Lambertville
New Hope
Mercer County
Area shown
Trenton



Turntable Junction (*see map*). At Flemington the terminus is located between the Stangl pottery shops, where the old kilns are still preserved, and the various novelty shops of colonial style Turntable Junction. The old Jersey Central turntable has been converted to a raised brick patio. Nearby, on the site of a recently razed foundry, Turntable Junction's builder Ted Merritt is constructing an early American operating museum village. With displays recreating the various aspects of everyday life during the period from the American Revolution through the Civil War, Liberty Village features craftsmen such as blacksmiths, glassblowers, candle makers, and silversmiths. Antique button and gun museums, a railroad museum, and a model farm are scheduled for inclusion.

Eating places in the Junction area include the schoolroom style Lunch Bell, colonial style Spread Eagle Inne, a snack bar near the BR&W tracks, and a contemporary restaurant located in the former Jersey Central passenger station.

Across Main Street, the Flemington Cut Glass Company is a major point of interest. Beyond it lies Paul Bunyan Village, another group of specialty shops, and the Blue Ox restaurant. Flemington Furs on Spring Street is one of the famous furriers in the east.

Ringoes. At the Black River & Western's headquarters, visitors may tour the engine-house and inspect the beautifully restored Pullman car *Enterprise.* A refreshment counter is located in the station, and near it, in a former CNJ baggage car, is a souvenir shop.

Across the tracks from the station, the BR&W is installing a railroad museum in a converted Erie coach. Beyond the siding where the museum cars are is a shady picnic grove where visitors may enjoy a rural lunch. A favorite pastime at Ringoes is watching the steam engines take on water at the fueling siding near the engine house.

RINGOES SCENES. Upper: No. 148 brings a school trip back to the station. Center cab diesel No. 7079 is sidetracked in front of the souvenir car. Under the water tower, the crane on the fueling track almost obscures the face of No. 60 undergoing repairs in the engine house. **Lower:** After their train ride, the schoolchildren are led on tour by costumed train hostess Bea Quick.

Photo by Wes Camp

MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE FREIGHT CREW. Above: Engineer Porter Collins on the sidetracked freight strikes a reverent pose as No. 148 rolls by with a school train. **Below:** Near Turntable Junction in Flemington, brakeman Nelson Tower throws a switch while engineer Collins and mascot Rintzi welcome a couple of young hoboes hitching a ride to the end of the line (500 feet).

Freight

The Black River runs scheduled freights on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Additional service is provided according to the customers' needs and according to the number of cars delivered at Lambertville by the Penn Central. Total volume runs around 750 cars a year at present.

On a normal freight day, diesel No. 400 and a red caboose set out from Ringoes at 8 a.m., heading south through the woods and farms to Lambertville. Charles Knapp is engineer, Bill Kintner, Jr. is conductor, and some volunteer may show up for the job of head brakeman. Directors Nelson Tower and Nick Burenga may help out as engineer or brakeman, and the caboose often carries visitors along for the ride. At the Penn Central interchange in Lambertville, No. 400 picks up the eight or so loaded cars set out by the Penn Central Bel-Del crew the night before, arranges them in the desired sequence, and trundles back up the line past Ringoes to Flemington, where most of the freight customers are located. The majority of the consist is hoppers and boxcars loaded with grain and animal feeds for the line's two biggest customers, the Delaware Valley Farmers' Cooperative and Ralston-Purina. Empty cars picked up from the shippers' sidings are returned to the Lambertville interchange, and diesel and caboose return to Ringoes.

The charge to ride the caboose is $3.75 for the full round trip. When the number of passengers warrants it, a coach is added, making the BR&W one of the few railroads in the east offering a mixed train (freight and passenger combined).

BR&W president John Bishop reports, "Our freight customers are happy with us because we've been able to provide service that a larger railroad, under the circumstances, just could not provide. We'll go out and run a train just for the sake of running a train." Managers at the two largest customers, the Farmers' Cooperative and Ralston-Purina, confirm the pleasant relationship: both companies are glad that freight shipments are brought in during the day (Penn Central delivered at night) and they find it helpful to deal with a regular freight crew familiar with their operations. Abe Berkowitz, manager of the Co-op, adds "Also, if we need five drills a week in an emergency, the Black River will do it. And their maintenance crew has rebuilt our siding. We pay for these extra services, but it's worth it." Ralston-Purina manager Harry Voorhees reports that since the BR&W takeover of the branch, incoming shipments are no longer tied up for a week or more at PC's Morrisville, Pa. yard. Mr. Voorhees states the case of the freight customer: "We can't afford to ship by truck—we depend on the rail."

BR&W General Manager Sam Freeman makes a telling point: "We're proving that private enterprise can still run a small railroad. I think it may point the way for a solution for some smaller towns that have a traffic potential to retain branch line operations. The larger railroads are getting to the point where they are just not able financially to operate many of these branch lines, even where there is a traffic potential. And there are many advantages to the customer: the operation is local, the people know you, and if they get in trouble, you're right there."

DRILLING FREIGHT can be a complicated operation. **Top:** At the siding of the Delaware Valley Farmers Cooperative Association, diesel No. 400 (not visible) has backed the loaded cars just brought up from Lambertville into the string of empties waiting on the siding. The caboose (sixth car from the right) marks the division between loads and empties. **Bottom:** The train has been broken in two parts. The empties (out of sight on the left), the caboose, and two loaded hoppers destined for Ralston-Purina (whose elevator appears in the background) have been taken out and left on the main while Freight Conductor Bill Kintner gives Engineer Porter Collins the signal for spotting a loaded hopper on the Co-op's siding.

STEAM POWERED FREIGHT, although not regularly scheduled, is an occasional event on a railroad with most of its horsepower in steam. **Top:** A scene from the days when saddletanker No. 14 was active. While brakemen Nick Burenga and Nelson Tower hold on for dear life, engineer Les Rockafellow hastily shifts a boxcar before he runs out of steam. **Bottom:** On a spring break-in run in 1972, No. 60 wheels a string of empties south out of Flemington.

LIGHTS, ACTION! Top: Taping a special program on the Black River & Western in 1965 for Walter Cronkite's television news program, a CBS camera crew records the gandy dancers at work. **Bottom:** The station sign reads Boston but the location is actually Gladstone, N. J. as a couple of BR&W coaches provide the setting for the train sequence in United Artists' film of Helen Keller's life, **The Miracle Worker.** Note that coaches were relettered only within camera range.

Both photos by N. Kent Loudon

Both photos by Vince Alvino

THE MAKING OF A TV COMMERCIAL, this one filmed in April 1972 for Burlington Mills. Location: Ringoes. Plot: girl awaits arrival of train; male model (at far right of righthand photo) swings off train, sweeps girl off her feet, removes his jacket (camera zooms in on Burlington label), puts jacket around girl's shoulders, and together they stroll into the figurative sunset. Rectangular object in upper area of lefthand photo is an overhead screen to diffuse available light over the scene of action. The righthand picture shows the view from the train during a pause in the day's shooting.

School Trips

In the spring and fall, the BR&W plays host to groups of school children three or four times a week. For many children, this is their first train ride. The youngsters come from all over the state by bus, they ride the steam train in the morning, tour the railroad museum, and have lunch in the picnic grove at Ringoes. A school train usually carries 300 to 400 children and teachers; the yearly average is over 6,000 school passengers.

Special Events

Charter Trips

Anybody with a whim for throwing an unusual party may charter a train, complete with refreshments and an on-board band (the Black River Gang) if desired. Perhaps the most unusual charter trip accommodated a marriage ceremony in the parlor car *Enterprise,* with the reception on board the moving train.

Movies, television, advertising

Black River coaches and locomotives have been used by movie men, notably for the train sequence in the United Artists' film, *The Miracle Worker.* CBS television crews recorded a special for Walter Cronkite's news program when the BR&W was just getting started on the Flemington branch in May 1965. And whenever Madison Avenue men need a railroad setting, whether for magazine layouts or television commercials, they find the Black River a favorite location. Ad men can come up with some rather hair-raising schemes, such as uncomfortably realistic train wrecks and tying girls to the rails, but the BR&Wers have learned to take such antics in stride.

Santa Claus Express

On Thanksgiving weekend Sunday the kiddies get candy and token gifts from jolly old Saint Nick, whose reindeer are temporarily replaced by a steam engine.

Photo by Michael Dunn

ON THE LAMBERTVILLE HALF OF THE LINE. Top: Diesel No. 400 heads the freight toward Flemington, while railroad mascot Rintzi supervises the operation from the lower right cab window. **Bottom:** The annual Thank You Express crossing the winding Alexauken Creek once of several times on its way toward Lambertville.

Photo by Vince Alvino

Present and Future

As this book goes to press, the Black River & Western is still hoping for a favorable decision by the Interstate Commerce Commission to buy and operate about four miles of the Somerville branch of the Jersey Central, starting from the connecting point between the two railroads in Turntable Junction. Service to the several major industries on that part of the CNJ trackage would about double the BR&W's freight traffic and, incidentally, put freight revenue ahead of passenger revenue, in the conventional railroad ratio.

But at the moment the Black River's main source of income is still the summer passenger business. The quota has been rising steadily at the rate of one to two thousand persons a year, with a current total of about thirty thousand passengers annually. Perhaps in the future the BR&W will run one train out of Flemington and another out of Lambertville, connecting at Ringoes. And General Manager Sam Freeman would like to run occasional day-long excursions on the Bel-Del division of the Penn Central, the line by which freight reaches the BR&W. This beautifully scenic stretch of railroad parallels the Delaware River from Trenton north to Phillipsburg. The immediate 50% increase in passenger business that greeted the initiation of two-train service in 1972 indicates there will be a market for almost anything the railroad chooses to offer the public. If nothing else, the Black River & Western is proving one thing: people like to ride trains.

Photo by John Helbok

BLOWING CLOUDS OF STEAM from open cylinder cocks, No. 60 moves past the water tower on the fueling siding, while diesel and caboose prepare for freight operations on the main line.

People and Trains

Why do people come to ride a little train out in the country pulled by a clamorous steam engine? When we asked some Black River visitors this question, here are some of the responses they gave.

For some visitors, the train is just another tourist attraction, "something to do on a weekend" to amuse the kids. For many other passengers, however, the train ride is something they go out of their way to find. Mark Leidenheimer of Piscataway, N. J., gave a list of reasons cited by many visitors: "The train goes with the country scenery, it's very enjoyable, very relaxing. This is something from the past—reminds you of back twenty or thirty years ago when people used to go to work in this kind of train, with the lights high in the ceiling and the clickety-clack of the wheels. When you take this ride and get out into the country, you feel more relaxed, you can forget about the cares of the world."

On virtually any trip between Flemington and Ringoes, of course, the riders include old railroaders reliving the life that meant most to them, symbolized above all by the steam locomotive. Melvin Brown, a former Erie brakeman from Bricktown, N. J., pointed out the various parts of the locomotive machinery to his son, observing, "When I was a boy I rode nothing but steam engines, they didn't have anything else."

But it's more than nostalgia that draws the people, for most of the visiitors are too young to remember steam as the dominant metaphor of motion. Jack Claridge, a young father from Bayonne, N. J. who brought his son and two other young boys to ride the train, summed up the magic of the steam locomotive: "It's the power and the noise, I guess—it's like a living thing. I like to watch the rods, the workmanship in it, the precision, things moving."

For youngsters of all ages, of course, the commotion of the steam engine generates instant excitement: the bell, the whistle, the steam, smoke, the huge wheels and revolving rods. Even for local children who have the train running practically in their backyards, it seems the magic doesn't pall. Young Anthony Patti of Flemington, for example, reported that he and his 3-year-old brother, Mark, come often to see the steamer because "it's exciting to watch." And Mrs. Robert Anderson, also of Flemington, reported as she shepherded a group of local youngsters on a birthday train party, "In the summertime we can hear the whistle when the wind is right. And the children all shout, 'There goes the Ringoes train!' "

THE FASCINATION OF STEAM is ageless. **Top:** A young rail buff's reaction to "feeling the rods" amuses Carl Conover, former superintendent of motive power. (Courtesy, **Hunterdon County Democrat.**) **Bottom:** An old railroader reliving the days of steam has a rapt audience.

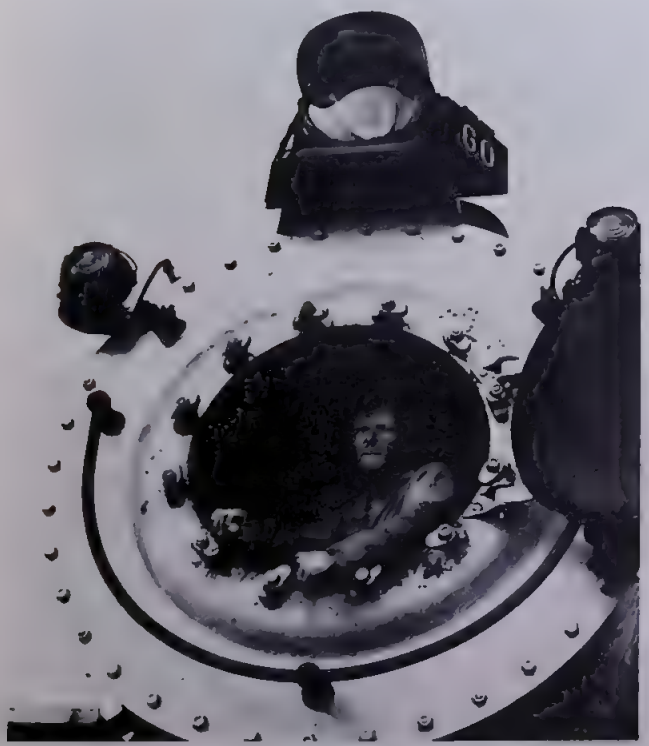
Men of the Railroad

The Black River & Western is a lucky railroad: it has a near-perfect location and events just seem to happen in its favor. But its biggest asset, the one which makes all the rest possible, is the men who run it. The seven directors, who are also the officers, happened to come together by lucky circumstance. All are successful in their respective professions, they enjoy railroading without being fanatics, and they are temperamentally congenial. They enjoy working on their railroad, and their abilities are conveniently complementary. Whatever job needs to be done, there is someone to do it; and no one considers himself above pitching in on such menial tasks as cleaning the train and policing the grounds. Vice President Nick Burenga, who with his wife Louanna runs the refreshment and souvenir concessions at Ringoes, tells it like it is: "You know, whenever I'm the conductor on the schcol train, Bea Quick, the train hostess, is always a-devilin' me—she says, 'Now I want you to walk through the train and I'm going to introduce you as Vice President to the school kids.' I say 'Don't do that, Bea, because just ten minutes before, I was probably downstairs cleaning toilets, so being Vice President doesn't carry any great weight around here.'"

To see these men dressed in old clothes and hard at work in the enginehouse, a visitor could scarcely guess their professional occupations. Over there flourishing a welding torch to make a new cowcatcher for No. 148 is President John Bishop (coordinator of industrial education in northern Hunderdon County). Making an ungodly racket as they straighten a bent uncoupling rod are Treasurer Nelson Tower (partner in Wood & Tower construction consultants in Princeton) and Vice President Nick Burenga (retired owner of Ringoes Feed Company). Outside the enginehouse, Lloyd Arkinstall (designer of merchandising displays and onetime fireman of K-4 locomotives on the New York & Long Branch Railroad) doesn't mind the grease as he crawls inside No. 148's frame to check the oiling points. Down the track, Secretary-General Manager Sam Freeman (co-owner of Somerset Airport) is willing to risk splinters as he works with the track gang to replace a worn tie. And often after a hard Saturday's work, these directors of the railroad will clean up in time to swing aboard the last train of the day and ride to Flemington and back like any visiting tourists.

For the BR&Wers, directors and volunteers alike, the work itself—the sheer physical and mental labor of running a railroad in all its aspects—is a major part of the pleasure of the whole thing. Nelson Tower, for example, concedes that he works much harder physically during a day at the railroad than in a whole week at the office, but he says he gets more "bushed" at the office. Explaining why he is willing to give so much time and effort to the railroad, Tower gives reasons that would seem to apply to all BR&Wers: "It's outdoors, it's mechanical, it's got motion to it, it's got the country, it's got nature connected with it. Like the night we came up from Flemington and saw all the wildlife—never seen so much in one hour." Nick Burenga joins in: "And we take all that for granted, and yet you ride the train and see the kids when we go by this little farm up here and see the little colt, some chickens and ducks—we take it as a matter of course until you see the reactions of these kids from the city who have never seen farm animals."

John Bishop feels this way: "It's a great delight to see the expression of youngsters when they're having possibly their first train ride with parents or grandparents. And people who are retired railroaders like to get back into the steam era: they enjoy the sound of the steam whistle and the exhaust of the engine as it climbs a grade—why, they get a tremendous amount of pleasure, and you feel that you're playing a part in providing this pleasure, not only for yourself but for so many other people."



All photos by John Helbok

GROOMING THE IRON HORSE. Above: Cleaning the smokebox. **Right:** Oiling the valve gear. **Opposite, top:** Turning down grease pin on side rod. **Opposite, bottom:** Lubricating the air compressor.

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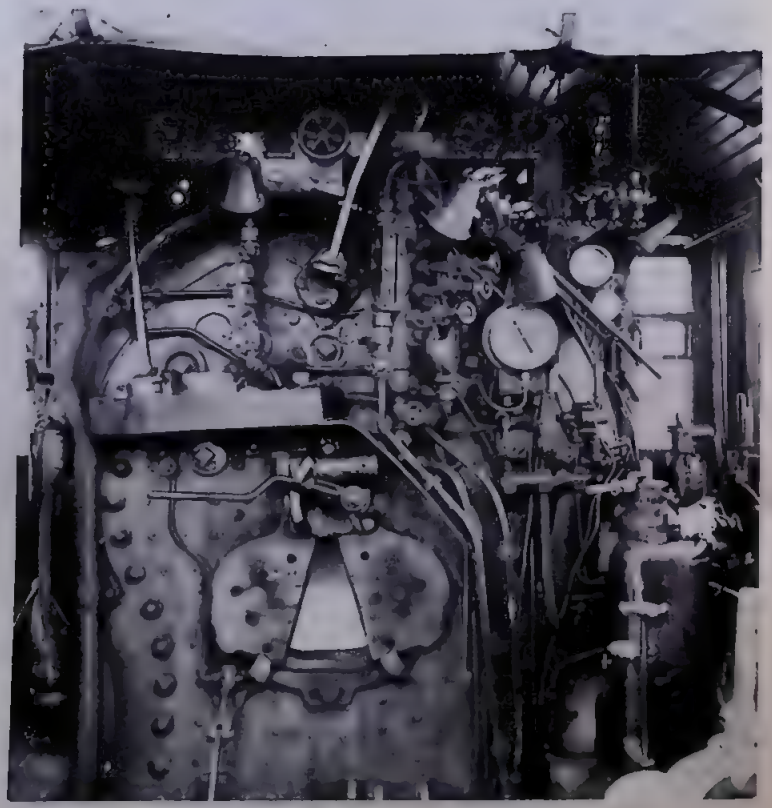
OUTSIDE THE LOCOMOTIVE CAB. From the engineer's seat, the view down the long boiler.

INSIDE THE LOCOMOTIVE CAB. Right: Behind the maze of piping and valves can be seen the cylindrical shape of No. 60's boiler with the fire below it. The fireman sits on the left and the engineer on the right. The diagonal rod appearing between the gauges on the right is the throttle; the brake stand is just below it. The needle on the largest gauge shows the boiler pressure at about 165 pounds per square inch. **Left:** While the fireman shovels coal into the firebox, the engineer checks the road ahead.



Left photo by Frank Ferris; right by James Thorn

Photo by Howard Pincus

Such enthusiasm and friendliness have attracted the local people, who donate their talents to the railroad in a kind of pageant of fun. In addition to the 35 or 40 volunteers who serve on the train and engine crews, the railroad has the Black River Gang, a ragtime Gay Nineties band which plays on board the train every other Sunday and on special occasions. Local personalities Ed and Bea Quick turn up regularly in old-fashioned costumes to lend atmosphere. Bea is the hostess on the school trips, and her news column in the *Hunterdon County Democrat* keeps the populace informed of goings-on at the railroad. Another colorful figure is Joe Adda, self-proclaimed Mayor of Hogtown, who at the slightest excuse dons a top hat and tails, drives out to the Hogtown "station" in a model T Ford, flags down the train, and passes out cigars and country cheer to all and sundry. Adda, a local farmer, is also a regular volunteer for serious restoration and maintenance work. While the railroad is a fun thing for the local folk, their participation is a valuable asset to the Black River, and this mutual appreciation may be one of reasons why the railroad enjoys generally good relations with the surrounding community.

Given the success of their venture so far, the directors occasionally dream that their railroad might someday make enough money to support them. If the Black River does expand, General Manager Freeman, for one, hopes that the personal touch will not be sacrificed: "I'd like to keep the idea that you're kind of a happy family. People feel this when they come here, there's such a friendly atmosphere, and that's what we'd hate to lose."

Will success spoil the Black River? Only the future can tell. But for the present at least, to the thousands of visitors, the school children, the volunteers, the local enthusiasts, and the freight shippers, one thing seems clear: the Black River & Western has found a pretty good way to run a railroad.

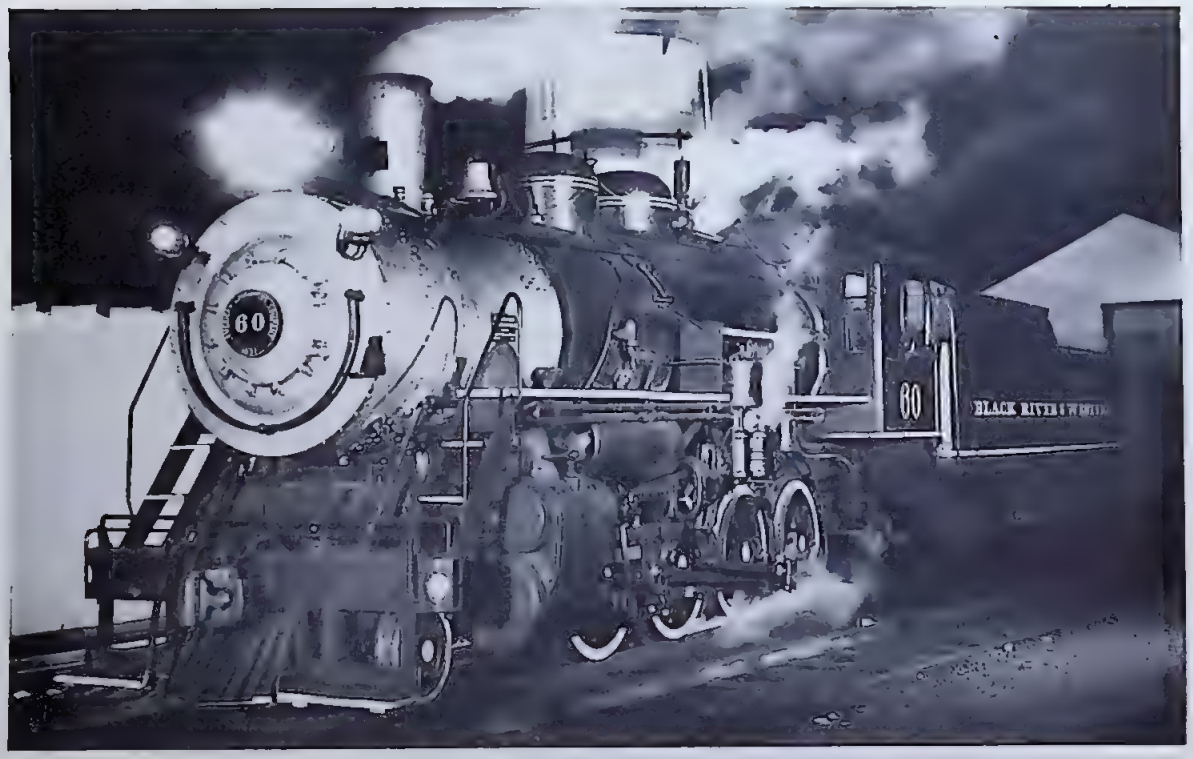


Photo by Howard Pincus

STEAM IN THE NIGHT: No. 60 rests by the water tower at Ringoes after bringing in a party train.

Photo by George A. Forero, Jr.

PLACE SIGNS. Above: No. 60 made history on November 26, 1967 when she rolled a special excursion train on the Long Island Railroad, which hadn't seen steam for more than a decade. **Below:** The setting may not be as grand, but for No. 148 her maiden run on the Black River & Western in April 1971 was history in its own way.

Photo by John Helbok

Roster of Equipment

LOCOMOTIVES

No. 60 2-8-0 Consolidation (coal), Alco 1937; Great Western
No. 148 4-6-2 Pacific (oil), Alco 1920; Florida East Coast, U.S. Sugar Co.
No. 400 600-HP EMD switcher, 1943; Port Everglades Terminal
No. 7079 400-HP G.E. switcher, 1941; U.S. Army (Piccatinny Arsenal)
No. 1 12-ton gas-electric, Mack Company 1927; Bigelow Carpet, Crucible Steel
No. 14 0-6-0 saddletank (oil), Porter 1920; Brooklyn Eastern District Terminal (inactive; property of Rail Tours, Inc.)

COACHES

No. 100 baggage RPO car, Belfast-Moosehead Lake, 1906
No. 101 combine passenger-baggage, Bangor & Aroostook, 1881 (in use as Flemington ticket office)
No. 102 combine passenger-baggage, Bangor & Aroostook, 1884
No. 103 day coach, Lackawanna, 1895
No. 105 business car, Canadian Northern, 1895
No. 106 office car, DL&W milk car, 1906
No. 301 day coach, Lackawanna, 1915
Nos. 311, 312, 313 Erie Stillwell coaches, 1934
Nos. 320, 321, 322 passenger coaches, CNJ, 1923
No. 420 baggage car, CNJ, 1920 (in use as souvenir car, Ringoes)
No. 700 Pullman parlor car *Enterprise,* PRR, 1912
No. 369 crew-shop-dormitory car *Conneaut,* Wabash RPO, N&W, High Iron Company, 1925
Four Erie-Lackawanna "Wyatt Earp" coaches, 1917 (recent acquisitions, not yet in service)

CABOOSES

No. 1 wooden 4-wheel, Morristown & Erie, 1884 (static display, Turntable Junction)
No. 200 steel, Reading & Cornwall, 1924

MAINTENANCE OF WAY: miscellaneous equipment including:

MW No. 6 Burro Crane Model 15, self-propelled, 1945
MW No. 10 flanger-tool car, air-operated, PRR, 1908
Rotary steam-driven snowplow, Cooke Locomotive, 1898, LIRR (leased, inactive)

Builder's photo

Specifications-No. 60

Built August 1937 by American Locomotive Company, New York,
for the Great Western Railway Company, Denver

Type	Consolidation 2-8-0
Service	Freight
No. in order	One
Boiler	
Pressure	200 psi
Inside diameter	66 in.
Cylinders	
Bore	19 in.
Stroke	26 in.
Driving wheel diameter	51 in.
Firebox	
Length	105⅛ in.
Width	41¼ in.
Tubes	
Diameter	
Tubes (158)	2 in.
Flues (28)	5⅜ in.
Length	12 ft. 6 in.
Grate area	30.1 sq. ft.
Total evaporating surface	1674 sq. ft.
Superheating surface	416 sq. ft.
Wheel base	
Driving	14 ft. 0 in.
Engine	22 ft. 4 in.
Engine & tender	57 ft. 2¼ in.
Weight in working order (pounds)	
On leading truck	19500
On driving wheels	141500
Total engine	161000
Tender (loaded)	149600
Engine & tender	310600
Tender capacity	
Coal	12 tons
Water	8000 gal.
Tractive effort	31290 lb.
Factor of adhesion*	4.52
Type of boiler	Extended wagontop
Type of valve gear	Walschaerts

*In calculating the factor of adhesion the formula used is: weight on drivers divided by rated tractive effort.

Specifications-No. 148

Built May 1920 by American Locomotive Company, Richmond,
for Florida East Coast Railway Company

Type	Pacific 4-6-2
Service	Passenger
No. in order	Ten, numbered 141 to 150
Boiler	
Pressure	180 psi.
Inside diameter	61 in.
Cylinders	
Bore	22 in.
Stroke	26 in.
Driving wheel diameter	68 in.
Firebox	
Length	96½ in.
Width	70¼ in.
Tubes	
Diameter	
Tubes (146)	2 in.
Flues (21)	5⅜ in.
Length	18 ft. 6 in.
Grate area	47.1 sq. ft.
Total evaporating surface	2111 sq. ft.
Superheating surface	440 sq. ft.
Wheel base	
Driving	12 ft. 4 in.
Engine	32 ft. 7 in.
Engine & tender	63 ft. 6⅜ in.
Weight in working order (pounds)	
On leading truck	40500
On driving wheels	126500
On trailing truck	37000
Total engine	204000
Tender (loaded)	162000
Engine & tender	366000
Tender capacity	
Fuel oil	3500 gal.
Water	7300 gal.
Tractive effort	28,300 lb.
Factor of adhesion*	4.47
Type of boiler	Extended wagontop
Type of valve gear	Walshaerts

*In calculating the factor of adhesion the formula used is: weight on drivers divided by rated tractive effort.

FLEMINGTON

Photo by John Helbok

BODY ENGLISH. When you are drilling freight cars, communication is nonverbal. Here Treasurer, Nelson Tower, acting as brakeman "talks" to Engineer Don Smith. This photo was taken at the Lambertville end of the line during the 1972 running of the Thank-you Express. #60 temporarily abandoned her passenger train to play with the freight cars that Penn Central diesels had just set off on the interchange.

Photo by Vince Alvino

Photo by John Helbok

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